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ABSTRACT

Children's broadcasting in Germany (public and private television as well as radio) is traditionally educational broadcasting that aims to show and explain the world to children, and seeks to motivate them to discover and use their creativity and imagination. It occurs in different types of programs and employs a variety of literary and journalistic forms to reach its goals. A typical German educational television program, "The Show with the Mouse," represents some of the characteristic features of German educational television: (1) a mixture of literary and journalistic forms; (2) a figure children can identify with integrates the mixture of the show; (3) the journalistic reports explain topics in a playful way; (4) a lot of time, money, and technical equipment are devoted to the production of the explanatory films and documentaries; and (5) most of the films and variety shows are produced in Germany or in cooperation with other European countries. Children's broadcasting includes literacy programs, journalistic programs and programs that mix both elements. The old, public service television system has to compete with the new private channels. Competition between shows produced for children and those initially meant for adults (such as the American program "Knightrider") is the rule, not the exception. The strength of the German tradition in educational broadcasting and the competition for the audience has resulted in considerable pluralism and variety of programming. (A chart of the types of educational programming in television and radio is attached.) (RS)

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PLURALISM ON THE SCREEN

Children's Broadcasting in Germany

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PLURALISM ON THE SCREEN

Children's Broadcasting in Germany

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A. Introduction

Children's broadcasting in Germany is traditionally educational broadcasting, and it is about these programs we want to talk. We believe that they are most suitable to characterize German childrens' television and to distinguish it from other countries' programming.

In our talk, we are concentrating on magazine-type television programs, leaving out single story fictional series or films. This is possible because the goals of educational broadcasting apply to all its types. Moreover, these goals are realized not only in television but in the more than thirty radio shows for children, too.

This is how we understand "educational broadcasting":

a) It substantially aims at showing and explaining the world to children;

b) educational broadcasting wants to motivate children to discover and to use their creativity and imagination;

c) entertainment is only <u>one</u> goal - among others.

Educational broadcasting occurs in different types of programs and employs a variety of literary and journalistic forms to reach its goals.

An additional remark is necessary: We cannot include the development of children's programs in the former GDR within the given time, but have to concentrate on the status quo. -

Today, the broadcasting for children in East Germany is principally the same as in the West of the country.

B. Children's Programs in the Electronic Media

I would like to show you an example of a typical German educational television program: The Show with the Mouse, which has just celebrated its twentieth birthday. It is broadcast nationwide on Sunday mornings between 11.30 and noon. This show is one of the favorites of German children.

(three to five minutes of the show are presented)

This show, aired on a public channel, has won several national and international awards. It represents some of the characteristic features of German educational television:

1) It is a mixture between literary and journalistic forms, that is: Cartoons, stories and mini plays mixed with explanatory films, interviews and documentaries.
2) An identification figure (that is, a figure the children can identify with or feel attracted to) integrates the mixture and gives the show its face - like the mouse and its companion, the small blue elephant.
   Typically, the identification figure is not a mainstream type: The mouse, for example, doesn't care about the way things have been since man exists - it finds her own ways, originally, with unconventional thinking. The mouse is flexible and clever. If a plan doesn't

work out, the mouse doesn't waste time complaining - it tries another solution and manages to turn failures into successes.

Other identification figures are people like Peter Cheerful with gold rimmed spectacles and a large moustache or puppets like Rudi the Raven. These figures have one thing in common: They are curious about the world surrounding them, they take the children's roles - they ask and don't accept simple explanations. How is ice-cream produced? How do the red stripes come into the white toothpaste? How are tin cans produced? How does a swan start flying, how does it land - compared to an airplane?

3) The journalistic reports have to give the answers. They explain about industry, technic, science, environmental conservation - and all this in a playful way.

4) The way of production is another characteristic: The films are not especially tempo oriented, but still they are not slow. A lot of effort is devoted to the documentaries with respect to time, money, and technical equipment. The films have to be visually appealing; they live and rely completely on the pictures.

In the "Mouse", the speakers usually present the explanatory texts free, that is, without a manuscript[1]. This allows for a light tone, for avoiding the tea-

cher's oratory pose. So everybody in the Show with the Mouse, even those who explain the stories, are talking like every-day people.

5) Most of the films and variety shows are produced in Germany or in cooperation with other European countries.

C. Types of Educational Programming

Let us pay a little more attention to the different forms of content that are typically used in educational programming. We distinguished three types.

------> (See chart)

We have listed in these examples radio programs, too, for those of you who are interested.

Not surprisingly, there are literary programs like plays and fairy tales; there are also journalistic types, and there is a mixture of both. Whereas the literary and the journalistic types can occur as content segments as well as whole programs, the mixed type is necessarily a <u>form</u> of program.

This chart is to illustrate the variety of <u>journalistic</u> programs and program content that shape children's broadcasting. There are not only the "How-does-it-work-stories",

but interviews, reports, reviews, too. There is, for example, a science show on TV, there is a magazine on technics, and even a ten minute newsreport for children is broadcast on workdays.

In radio as well as in television, children often act as the journalists themselves: They do the reporting, the interviewing and sometimes the moderating.

The type of program to which "The Show with the Mouse" belongs, is what we called "variety show". This form has had quite an amount of representatives since the late sixties when it first developed; at the moment, there are several shows like this in different nationwide television channels, including the German version of Sesame Street.

This is especially interesting, since it includes also shows that are broadcast in private channels. The educational tradition is so strong - and with it the expectations and lobbies of parents and educators - that even private stations produce their own shows.

D. The Institutional Background

A few words about the organization of the electronic media in Germany can't be avoided. Since the mid eighties we have two competing systems: The old, public service stations and the new private channels. While the general audience still

prefers the public channels, the children favor the private ones[2].

In Germany, the public channels have commercials, too, though to a limited extent. However, the majority of children's educational programs in television as well as in radio are broadcast on channels or at times whithout commercials.

The private stations are mostly broadcasting cheap entertainment programs like game shows and cartoons, e.g. He-Man or the Teenage Turtles. Public as well as private channels broadcast series like The Cosby Show, Dactari, Star Trek, Airwolf, Alf, and, not to forget, the very popular Knightrider.

E. The Audience

"The Show with the Mouse" and Knightrider actually struggle for the number one position - with the "Mouse" being still safe ahead. Both attract between 10 and 12 percent of the child audience[3].

This competition between shows produced for children and those initially meant for adults is the rule, not the exception - in Germany as well as in other countries. While the above mentioned educational shows are successful on the

market, they represent the highlights of self produced television. The other programs find their audience, too, but it simply cannot compare to the most popular shows of all categories: For example, in 1989, among them were family game shows and evening series, many of them broadcast after eight o'clock[4].

The average daily watching time for children aged six to nine, by the way, was 77 minutes in 1989; older children between ten and 13 watched 95 minutes[5]. Unfortunately, there are no precise data collected continuously for pre-school children; estimated from numbers from the mid-eighties, they watch some 40 minutes daily[6].

F. Summary

Since children watch all kind of programs, not only the educational ones, and since they do it to a large extent, it is widely accepted that children's broadcasting is what children choose to watch and listen to (after Gerd K. Münte-fering). This means that the authors, editors, and producers of children's broadcasting have to <u>compete</u> for the audience.

Because of the strength of the German tradition in educatio-nal broadcasting this competition becomes harder, so that even private media have to take the tradition into account.

Airing nothing but "uneducational" cartoons doesn't seem to be sufficient.

As a result, the pluralism and variety of educational programming produced for or in Germany is considerable.

Let us now be a little more precise about what the children are going to be "educated" to: Ideologies are completely out - whatever they might look like. Instead, information about the social, technical and political world surrounding children is offered as unbiased as possible.

But this doesn't mean that children's broadcasting is unsensual, unimaginative. As Heike Mundzeck, a German film author, puts it: Television for children should tell "poetic tales explaining the world"[7].

To finish we cite one of the former regular contributors to "The Show with the Mouse". The late Ota Hofman, a Czech playwrite, said once: "The task is to tell children that they have a right to their dreams and to enjoy their specific humour; that they have the right to criticize the adults' way of life, and that it is not true when someone tries to make them believe that they are only copies of the grown ups."[8]

References:

[1] According to editor Sigi Grewenig. Interview by Heinrich von Nussbaum. In: Süddeutsche Zeitung, 14.3.1988.

[2] See Wolfgang Darschin/Bernward Frank (1991): Tendenzen im Zuschauerverhalten. Fernsehgewohnheiten und Fernsehreichweiten im Jahr 1990. In: Media Perspektiven, Nr. 3, p. 178-193; Table 3, p. 180; Table 11, p. 187; Table 13, p. 189

[3] "Knightrider" is broadcast on the private channel "RTL plus", which can be received in only 66% of the German households. Half of these 66% get RTL plus via cable, the other half via air. The 10% to 12% reach mentioned among children stem from measurements in cable-households only.

In the first three months of 1991, the "Mouse" reached 15% of children aged between 3-5 (market share 87%), 14% of the 6-9 year old (m.s. 76%), and 9% of the 10-13 year old children (m.s. 68%). These numbers are probably higher than they would normally be, because the "20ieth Birthday-Show" was aired within this period, with an audience reach of 24%, 19% rsp., 16% rsp., in the three age groups.

Information according to a special analysis of the "RTL plus" media research department, submitted to the authors on May 15, 1991.

[4] Imme Horn (1991): Zum Fernsehverhalten von Kindern. Ergebnisse aus der Fernsehforschung der öfentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten. In: Hans Dieter Erlinger/Dirk Ulf Stötzel (Hrsg.): Geschichte des Kinderfernsehens in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Berlin: Spiess; p. 271-289; p. 286.

[5] ibid., p. 284

[6] ibid., p. 288. The amount of 40 minutes daily watching time applies to the year 1984 and to children aged 3 to 7.

[7] Heike Mundzeck (1989): Ansporn zur Abgrenzung, nicht Annäherung. In: epd/Kirche und Rundfunk, Nr. 77, 30. September

[8] Cited in: Hans Dieter Erlinger (1988): Magazine für Kinder: Was soll daran politisch sein? In: Dirk Ulf Stötzel (Hrsg.): Kinderfernsehen I. Essen: Verlag Die Blaue Eule, p. 55-65; p. 63

Types of Educational Programming in Television and Radio

	LITERARY	MIXED	JOURNALISTIC
FORMAL CHARACTER	content segment form of program	form of program	content segment form of program
EXAMPLES / MEDIUM OF PREVALENCE	– (adaptations of) children's books/ plays (TV, R) – cartoons (TV) – good night stories (TV, R) – fairy tales (TV, R) – radio plays (R)	– „variety show": reports, plays, interviews, tales, with person(s) or animal(s) as identification figures (TV) – magazine forms: reports (single topic or several topics) alternating with music; can contain radio plays, tales, songs; identification figures (R)	– newscasts (TV) – reports, interviews, features, reviews (TV, R) – information/ learning oriented stories („How-to", „How does that work?") (TV, R) – studio discussions with children and moderators/ hosts (TV, R) – very often the children themselves are reporters, interviewers, reviewers and moderators (TV, R)

TV = television
R = radio